

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday February 16, 2020 "Don't Stop Believing: Centering and contemplative prayer."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II Recap.

This is our second Sunday of our prayer series, and we're taking a deep look and incorporating specific practices at what prayer is, and how we can be better at it. We all know these things. Prayer is important or Jesus wouldn't have taught us how to do it. Prayer is hard, and we know this because the disciples who spent all their time with Jesus, asked him how to do prayer. And, we know we all have room for improvement in how we pray. Last week we broke down The Lord's Prayer, and then did an actual time of guided prayer to help us focus on working through some specifics of prayer. And we got a lot of good feedback about that exercise. All of that material is available if you missed it.

III Sunday.

We introduced a different type of prayer, and one that probably isn't all that familiar to many of you. It's called centering or contemplative prayer, and is less focused on the specific mechanics or 'how to's' of prayer, and building the skill of blocking out distractions and just focusing on God. It primarily is concerned with listening to God rather than us doing the talking. And this centering prayer is hard because it requires us to be able to handle all of the distractions, external and internal, that often keep us from being able to keep our focus on God.

When you pray do you deal with being distracted?

What are some of the things that distract you during prayer?

Have you found anything that helps keep you focused when you pray?

Kal presented three scriptures that gave us important truths, understandings, things we need to work into our practice of centering/contemplative prayer. Here are the passages and the corresponding truths from each. Read these passages and we'll then talk about all three of those truths.

1. The importance of silence. 1 Kings 19:9-13.

2. The importance of stillness. Psalm 46:10.

3. The importance of aloneness Mark 1:35.

What jumped out to you from each passage?

How did they speak to you about incorporating those specific truths into a more contemplative style of prayer?

How difficult is it for you to be able to practice each one of those?

Not only did we talk about each of these, we also walked through another time of contemplative prayer, so those questions are included.

1. The importance of silence.

In this passage from 1 Kings, we see Elijah going to God, being bold in what he needed, and then God telling him to wait for him. And even though the passage seems to imply that God was responsible for the wind, earthquake, and fire, (and it was difficult not to list these as Earth, Wind, and Fire), God was not in them. In fact, the passage is also pretty clear that God wasn't in the gentle whisper, or still small voice. The Hebrew word seems to suggest this whisper is actually the sound when all sounds are gone. And once Elijah was able to 'hear the silence' he was able to find God.

So, what does this say to you about the importance and role that silence plays in finding God? What are some things going on inside of you that you need to identify, surface, and give to God?

2. The importance of stillness.

The next passage was just one verse Psalm 46:10. This is an odd verse just stuck in an entire song about the glory and majesty of God. So, what the author seems to be saying, is that in order to experience all of who God is, to know him not just know ABOUT him, we have to build moments of being still in our lives. And it's in that act of stillness we can grow an assurance of just who God is.

So, how do you experience stillness, and what makes it difficult for you?

What is going on around you that you have to learn to block out?

3. The importance of getting alone.

Lastly, we saw even Jesus realized and practiced this truth of just getting off to an isolated place to experience his father...God. Our lives can be so cluttered with...stuff, that we're not able in those places to be with God the way we need to. And this often requires us to get away to a place where we don't have to deal with all of those distractions.

How have you experienced quiet places? Is it easy or difficult to make use of isolated places?

What helps you identify God's presence?

Contemplative/centering prayer is simply another form of prayer that helps us push past the drift of prayer just being another habit, that we do without really thinking about it or being mindful in our time with God. It grows within us the skill of creating silent, still places to just be with God. And helps us to learn to listen to God as much as we want to talk to him.

This type of prayer takes practice and a commitment to push past the difficulty of it. But in the long run it's more than worth it. Make a commitment to work this in your regular practice of prayer.

The ten minute challenge. This week set aside a ten minute block just to be with God. You'll find it makes all the difference in the world

